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Fourth Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala

Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

FOURTH CONTINENTAL SUMMIT

OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND NATIONALITIES OF ABYA YALA

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More than six thousand Indigenous delegates from 22 countries across the Americas gathered on the shores of Lake Titikaka at the heart of the Andean world in the Peruvian highland city of Puno during the last week of May 2009 for the Fourth Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala.¹ The summit concluded with the reading of the *Lake Titikaka Declaration* that condemned western capitalism for the current economic and environmental crises that is leading to the death of the planet. The delegates called for an alternative of life based on the principles and practices of Indigenous peoples that emphasize equilibrium and diversity.

The 2009 Puno summit built on a series of meetings that have led to a strong and unified continental Indigenous movement. The first summit was held in Teotihuacan, Mexico in 2000, followed by meetings in Quito, Ecuador in 2004 and Iximche', Guatemala in 2007. These summits built on a longer organizational process that includes the First Encounter of Southern Cone Indian Organizations in Ollantaytambo, Peru in 1980, and the First Continental Conference on Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance held in Quito, Ecuador in 1990.² The call for the summit emphasized that Indigenous peoples had organized and convened the meeting themselves and on their own terms in order to build Indigenous unity across the Americas.

At the 2007 Guatemalan gathering, Argentine delegates proposed holding the Fourth Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities on the Chilean side of the triple Peru/Bolivia/Chile border. Although such a spot was politically significant, the logistical demands of bringing thousands of people to a remote location proved to be too daunting. The Guatemalan summit had left a local organizing committee in charge of arranging the specific details, and they decided a better site would be the tourist city of Puno. This location provided both an abundance of hotel rooms, a conveniently located airport, and the support of the municipal government. Holding the meeting in Peru also proved to be a politically astute choice given the presence of a growing and increasingly powerful Indigenous movement in that country.³ Although not a direct outcome of the summit, an Indigenous strike in the Peruvian Amazon leading to a massacre the week after the summit further turned the world's attention to Peru, placing it directly in the midst of debates concerning environmental issues, the crisis of the capitalist system, and the collapse of western civilization.



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Leading up to the Puno summit, organizers held preparatory meetings in Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador. These meetings were designed to prepare delegates for the Puno summit, and to frame out topics of discussion for the main meeting. All of these factors contributed to a very successful gathering. As organizers noted, the process of building the summit “came from the bottom up,” from locating a site, defining the agenda, and mobilizing participation.⁴ So many people flooded to the meeting that organizers announced that they were cutting off individual registrations; only groups could subsequently register delegates. Considering that the previous summits had been postponed, it was quite a nod to successful organizing strategies that the fourth summit largely came off largely as planned.

The lead organizers for the event were the Coordinating Body of Andean Indigenous Organizations (CAOI) and its Peruvian member the National Coordinating Committee of Communities Affected by Mining (CONACAMI). Local organizers also formed a Communal Council of Quechuas and Aymaras for this purpose. The summit was held at the National Altiplano University (UNA). In welcoming delegates to Puno, university rector Martha Tapia Infantes emphasized how appropriate it was to have the Indigenous gathering on the campus because of its mission to address many of the same issues in rural communities that the summit was engaging.

The slogan of the third Indigenous summit in Guatemala was “from resistance to power,” reflecting social movement attempts to engage electoral politics. The election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia had brought the issue of electoral participation to the forefront, and triggered hopeful optimism for additional Indigenous electoral gains elsewhere across the Americas. Two primary topics of discussion in Guatemala were the formation of plurinational states and embracing the Quechua concept of *sumak kawsay*, of living well, not just living better. Since the 2007 Guatemalan summit, both of these concepts have made their way into the Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions. The

invitation to the 2009 summit stated that “we have already passed from resistance to power, we have demonstrated that we have proposals for the survival of all humanity.” As a result, the slogan of the Puno summit became “For plurinational states and living well!” These twin concepts underscored and informed discussions, emerging repeatedly throughout the summit.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S SUMMIT

Indigenous communities have long been proud of their egalitarian and horizontal nature that includes gender duality or complementarity which theoretically is supposed to open up spaces for both men and women. From this perspective, patriarchy and machismo are often depicted as western values that are foreign to Indigenous communities and cosmologies. Nevertheless and despite a long history of strong female leadership, the Indigenous summits have traditionally been overwhelmingly male spaces with women often relegated to marginal or token roles.

Recognizing ongoing problems of gender inequalities in Indigenous organizing efforts, at the 2007 Guatemalan summit women decided to organize their own summit to discuss their concerns. As a result, the Puno summit opened with over two thousand Indigenous women gathering in a two-day First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women. Their stated objective was to create a space for women to meet and develop a plan to defend their rights with an eye toward unity, equality, and reciprocity. Although framed as a women’s summit, topics of conversation extended well beyond narrowly defined Indigenous women’s or gender issues. The slogans for the summit included opposition to free trade agreements and war, and an embrace of life, self-determination, plurinationalism, and living well. Although under these rubrics the topics of conversation ranged broadly, it did remain very much a women’s summit in the sense that it was almost entirely organized and led by Indigenous women.

The summit started on the morning of May 27 with a march from the (appropriately selected) women’s plaza to the university where the summit was held. It was a small march, but at the university several other (and larger) marches joined it. Several (male) spiritual leaders led a religious ceremony on the university grounds. The summit then opened with three panels that set the agenda and tone for the meeting. The first panel was on Cosmology and Identity: Model of Development, with presentations by Juana Bartzibal from Waqikb’kej (Guatemala), Rucilda Nunta Guimaraes from AIDSEP (Peru), and Nancy Chila from CONAMAQ (Bolivia). Sonia Henríquez, a Kuna from Panama moderated the panel. The main themes were solidarity and reciprocity.

The second panel was on the Rights of Women: Violence and Racism. The presenters were María Miquelina from COIAB (Brazil) and Aida Quilcue from ONIC (Colombia). Cecilia Velázquez from CONAIE (Ecuador) moderated the panel. A key theme in this session was the importance of both Indigenous peoples and women in the construction of a plurinational state. This was the only panel with a male presenter. CAOI leader Miguel Palacín and the lead organizer for the summit, joined the panel to give a male perspective on these issues. He emphasized the standard Andean themes of gender equilibrium, with the importance of participation of both men and women in the building a sustainable society.

The third panel was on Women in the Construction of Power and Democracy, with presentations from Vicenta Chuma from ECUARUNARI (Ecuador), Amparo Gutiérrez from REMUI (Mexico), and Leonilda Zurita from Bartolina Sisa (Bolivia). Blanca Chancosa from ECUARUNARI (Ecuador) moderated. The presenters emphasized the importance of looking at power and democracy from the perspective of women, and the need for solidarity to achieve these goals.

After these opening panels, delegates broke into 16 different workshops ranging through topics such as leadership, organization, identity, communication, territory, migration, biodiversity, and violence. Those workshops then gathered into six thematic sessions to draft proposals for a final plenary session. The six sessions were on cosmology and identity; collective rights; the construction of power and democracy; alternative development models; violence and discrimination; and communication. Each of these sessions reported its key demands back to the general assembly.

Much of the concrete work and specific suggestions in the summit emerged out of these workshops and thematic sessions. The session on identity called for a reconstitution of the cosmology of Indigenous peoples and nationalities in order to maintain their spirituality and culture. Furthermore, they demanded that Indigenous cosmologies not be folklorized or commercialized. Instead, they requested respect for sacred sites and recognition of the political, social, cultural, and economic knowledge of their ancestral authorities. The delegates also called for an end to machismo and racism, advocated that these should be replaced instead with Indigenous values of complementarity, duality, equilibrium, respect, and harmony. Both on a personal and political level, they pointed to a need to move from empty discourse to concrete practices.

The workshop on collective rights argued that Indigenous communities should use international agreements and declarations to defend their rights. Women, as the providers of life, should learn how to use these tools in their own struggles. They should not remain passive in the implementation of public policies, particularly in the face of those that destroy the environment and other forms of life. In particular, they pointed to the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 and the *United Nations Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as key documents to advance their struggles. In order to make the most effective use of these platforms, they needed to strengthen the political formation of Indigenous women. In this process, they should retain their fundamental values of transparency, honor, honesty, and truth.

The session on alternative development models proposed examining the impact of globalization on Indigenous communities from a women’s perspective. Many of the topics related to territory, migration, biodiversity, and food sovereignty, however, echoed themes of broader concern to Indigenous communities. Delegates pointed to the need to recover traditional lands from large estates, and implement alternative development models that would favor Indigenous peoples. They called on governments to help create dignified jobs and repeal neoliberal policies that created the need for people to immigrate in the first place. Water should be treated as something essential for life and not as an economic commodity. They pointed to ancestral cosmologies as a way to combat climatic changes. In terms of food sovereignty, they called for small scale organic production with farmers marketing their own crops without

the need for intermediaries who often soaked up all of the profits.

To combat violence and discrimination, delegates called for guarantees of equal access to decent jobs. Bilingual education also promised to diminish problems of racism and discrimination. The women also called for reparations for victims of armed conflicts, as well as for those injured by transnational corporations. Finally, the women called for a prohibition on the sale of war toys that they blamed for creating a culture of violence. This last mention of toys was one of the few points in the statement that appeared to be uniquely a result of female sensibilities on this issue.

A final session on communication proposed a collective and sustainable system that maintained its independence from government structures. Instead, grassroots organizations should develop strategies to use communication networks to advance a political agenda. In particular, delegates called for women to learn how to use new technologies. This was important in order to create an equitable, equal, and complementary communication network.

After two days of meetings, the women's forum closed with a marathon 4-hour long plenary session. Blanca Chancoso, the moderator, said that men were free to participate, but that women should be allowed to speak first. In reality, this was an entirely women-run event. It was not until the very end when Bolivian women kept insisting that a defense of coca needed to be included in the final statement (and Chancoso kept insisting that it was already there) that a man stood up to defend the ancient value of the sacred leaf that the *Padres Inkas* (delegates shouted "and *Madre Inkas* too") gave to us. Some of the women delegates thought that it was so inappropriate that this man had inserted himself into their discussions that they took him outside and told him they were going to teach him a lesson. In a joking fashion, they hoisted him up on their shoulders and paraded him around the university grounds. Unmistakably, women were in charge of this scene.

FOURTH SUMMIT

The main summit began on May 29 with an early morning ritual ceremony in Puno's central plaza (Plaza de Armas). After the ceremony and breakfast, delegates left on a march that wound its way through the streets of the city and down to the Lake Titicaca waterfront. An outdoor stage held the inaugural session of the summit, followed by 2 panels on the crisis of capitalism and plurinationalism. After the inaugural activities, delegates continued on to the university for 60 different breakout sessions. As with the women's summit, these sessions were then combined into 10 panels with each of those presenting their results to a final plenary session at the end of the summit.

Some observers were concerned that women's issues were not among those listed as topics of discussion at the Indigenous summit. Launching the activities with the women's meeting, however, effectively influenced subsequent discussions in the main summit. Women had a much more visible and active presence in presentations and discussions than in previous events. That is not to say that complete gender equality was achieved, but it was an important step in the right direction.

With both Ecuador and Bolivia having recently approved new constitutions that recognize the rights of Indigenous nationalities, plurinationalism became a key theme at this summit. Humberto Cholango, the president of ECUARUNARI, the movement of

highland Kichwas in Ecuador, is a strong advocate of plurinationalism. He argued that "one can't say that a plurinational state is only for Indigenous peoples, or only for us with the goal of isolating others." Rather, he contended that "a plurinational state has to include Indigenous peoples, Blacks, poor people, marginalized social sectors, workers who have been victims of the neoliberal model." He advocated that a key agenda item coming out of the forum should be that Indigenous activists should advocate for the inclusion of plurinationalism in the constitutions of other countries where it does not already exist.

The theme of plurinationalism as an inclusionary ideology was echoed repeatedly throughout the summit in many different ways. Cecilia Velázquez from the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) added that "we can't speak of constructing plurinational states without the participation of Indigenous women. At the World Social Forum in Brazil they said that another world is possible with the participation of Indigenous peoples. We also say that that the construction of plurinational states is only possible with the presence of Indigenous women." The concept of plurinationalism continues to spread to other areas, especially Guatemala and Peru that also have large Indigenous populations. As an example of this spreading influence, CONACAMI president Mario Palacios and one of the lead organizers of the Puno summit is involved in the creation of a new political party, called "Perú Plurinacional."

In addition to the theme of plurinationalism, the summit also emphasized the Quechua concept of *sumak kawsay*, of living well, not just living better. Indigenous activists have embraced this concept as an alternative to government or corporate ideas of development often based on extractive enterprises such as petroleum or gold mining. They challenged western models that sought to define a good life as one based on high levels of consumption, leading to over exploiting natural resources that triggered an environmental crisis with a disproportionate impact on Indigenous peoples. "Development should be in harmony with Mother Earth, with nature, not destroy it," Palacios said. "We have to overcome the irrational use of resources and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples."⁵ In an editorial, CAOI proposed "using nature, but without damaging it."⁶ Indigenous delegates imagined alternative models that placed the needs and concerns of people and future generations ahead of that of corporate profits or the interests of a national security state.

Under these twin themes of plurinationalism and living well, delegates debated a wide range of issues. These included opposition to the privatization of natural resources, extractive enterprises, and the criminalization of social movements. Panels also focused on issues such as food sovereignty, climatic justice, and migration. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano who has long worked with Indigenous movements said that he believed "that this meeting is the most important political act in Latin America this year. It is important not only for Indigenous peoples, but also for the rest of humanity. It calls into question the role of capital in its worst moment as it threatens the survival of the planet." As Quijano notes, Indigenous communities have emerged at the forefront of struggles for a better future.

LAKE TITIKAKA DECLARATION

The summit ended with a massive plenary session that presented the findings of different groups that met during the week and

featured the reading of the summit's concluding document, the *Lake Titikaka Declaration*. Many of the specifics and much of the language of this declaration was similar to that of previous documents. A theme throughout these Indigenous gatherings, particularly those with a significant Bolivian presence, is a call for the decriminalization of the coca leaf. Indigenous declarations have long called for solidarity with the Cuban revolution, and this one called for Israel to leave Palestinian territories. Most notably, the *Lake Titikaka Declaration* added that the world was suffering through a deep crisis of western civilization. This crisis was exhibited in environmental and financial collapses that was destroying the planet. It offered an alternative of life based on the twin principles of plurinationalism and living well. The declaration also advocated the creation of an international climate justice tribunal to prosecute corporations and governments who damage the environment.

To achieve these goals of protecting the planet, the summit pledged to engage in a global mobilization in defense of mother earth beginning on the symbolically important date of October 12, 2009. The dominant culture traditionally celebrated the anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas as the day of *hispanidad* (Spanishness) or the mestizo race, but after protests against the 1992 quincentennial of Columbus' voyage, Indigenous organizations have converted it into a day of resistance against exploitation, exclusion, and ethnocide. The summit called for massive protests on this day against a capitalist system that is destroying the planet through the commercialization of life, pollution of the environment, and criminalization of social struggles. Proposed actions were to include protests in front of the United Nations and multinational corporations involved in extractive enterprises, discussion forums on how to defend the mother earth, tribunals on climate justice, and assemblies to articulate strategies to bring to the conference on the *Kyoto Protocol* planned for Copenhagen in December 2009. These actions were to culminate on October 16 in a day of action for food sovereignty organized by the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the international small farmers group Vía Campesina, significantly bridging the Indigenous and peasant wings of international rural peoples movements.

On a related topic, the *Lake Titikaka Declaration* reiterated a call for a Global Forum on the Crisis of Western Civilization, Decolonization, Living Well, and Alternative Paradigms that was originally proposed at the 2009 World Social Forum in Belem. Planned for Cuzco, Peru for March 26-28, 2010, the purpose of the forum was to deepen an analysis of the crisis of western capitalist civilization as expressed through the multiple food, energy, financial, environmental, cultural and other concurrent crises. An objective was to decolonize power and knowledge and organize spaces of action and reflection in the construction of positive alternatives. Similar to the October 12 mobilizations, in addition to Indigenous peoples this forum was to include the participation of broader social movements. Whereas previous Indigenous statements often emphasized broad general statements, a focus on specific programs and actions characterized the *Lake Titikaka Declaration*. Increasingly significant initiatives and concrete alternatives emerged out of these international Indigenous gatherings.

YOUTH ENCOUNTER

In parallel to the Indigenous and women's summits, hundreds of Indigenous youth and children held their second encounters in Puno in which they discussed and debated their own interests. These meetings followed on the heels of similar gatherings held in 2007 at the Guatemalan summit that were designed to overcome the economic, cultural, social, and political exclusion of Indigenous youth and children. In Peru, for two days the youth engaged similar topics of discussion (plurinational states, crisis of capitalism, territory, identity, education, health care) as the main summit. Similar to the women's summit, a difference from the general gathering was that this was a youth organized and led meeting. Meeting in a noisy auditorium on the university campus, the high energy discussions culminated in a plenary session that consolidated their main concerns and interests.



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The concluding political declaration of the youth forum followed along similar ideological lines of the Indigenous and women's summits, but perhaps with more of a culturalist twist. Plurinational states, their declaration began, "means recognizing diverse cultural identities" that "includes a communitarian democracy in which education, health, spirituality, language, and communal relations are horizontal." The statement strongly criticized a repressive capitalist system as racist, for criminalizing social struggles, and for "suffocating our peoples and nations." Capitalism imposes systems of acculturation, assimilation, and folklorization, all of which "weaken our cultural values." Capitalism oppresses people, leading to migration and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, a "neoliberal and neocolonial capitalist system imposes an educational system that is not adequate for our cosmology." Instead, they called for an integral educational system that "feeds our system as well as our intellect." Such a system would embrace "our ancestral ways of communicating knowledge of our cosmology." Similarly, an Indigenous health care system would seek to preserve the *cosmocimientos* or knowledge of cosmologies of their ancestors.

Unlike the Indigenous or women's summits, the youth discourse was underscored with repeated references to the acknowledgement, respect, and reconstruction of the "ancestral millenarian cosmologies inherited from our grandfathers and grandmothers." The youth summit closed with a call to create schools to train Indigenous youth with the political, ideological, and technical skills

necessary to carry on their struggle to achieve their social, political, economic, and spiritual vision. They promised to engage in information campaigns about the destruction that the capitalist system was causing to the “equilibrium and harmony between human beings and the *Pachamama*.”⁷ Whereas the *Lake Titikaka Declaration* proposed concrete actions to bring an end to the damaging effects of neoliberal capitalism, the youth statement preserved a tone more common to earlier proclamations.

MILITARIZATION OF SOCIAL SPACES

One of the increasingly pressing themes in these Indigenous summits is the militarization of civil society. The Guatemalan summit had a heavy police presence, allegedly justified by the high crime rate in that country. The Puno summit was also surrounded by police, but without the accompanying justification of problems of criminal violence. Even though organizers had made the security arrangements with local authorities, it left many delegates feeling as if they were under constant political surveillance. For example, the opening women’s march was followed by a large police contingent, with at least as many cops as marchers. Police also positioned themselves outside of the university gates along with a large riot control vehicle. As this was an entirely peaceful gathering, this large police presence was hardly justified. Interestingly, the national police only used Indigenous women and men dressed in community policing uniforms to help provide security inside the university.

A related theme at the summit was the criminalization of social movements. Governments from across the region contract with multinational petroleum interests and other extractive industries, and then prosecute Indigenous peoples who take actions in opposition to those neoliberal policies. “They criminalize us when we want to protect Mother Nature,” said CONACAMI president Mario Palacios who has a long history of leading struggles against mining corporations in Peru that destroy local communities.⁸ Delegates observed that previously they faced oppression from the countries’ armed forces, but now their livelihoods are threatened by transnational corporations. The degree of assault and collusion with government officials led Tupac Enrique Acosta of the Izkalotlan Pueblo to observe that “these aren’t governments; they’re accomplices.” This astute observation rings particularly true for rural communities in Peru that have faced persecution from the government of Alan García for opposing the extractive policies of mining corporations.

An important theme at social forums is a solidarity economy, with local vendors efficiently providing nutritious and inexpensive food for the delegates. In Guatemala, organizers contracted with local communities to cook a basic campesino diet of rice and beans, which worked very well. Apparently since many local communities around Puno are reliant on the tourist trade for their survival they were hesitant to give that up in support of the summit. Instead, organizers contracted a commercial vendor who provided a standard but bland Andean diet of rice, potatoes, and chicken in styrofoam containers. The result was long lines, frequent shortages, and trash littered across the university grounds.

AMAZON

The Puno summit was quickly overshadowed by the massacre of dozens of Indigenous protesters, the wounding of hundreds more, and the disappearance of others in the Peruvian Amazon in the week after the continental gathering. The conflict had been

building since April 9 when activists organized a strike against García’s government over its attempts to usurp their territorial and proprietary rights. On June 5, the government used overwhelming force to breakup a roadblock by Bagua in the northeastern Amazon. Protesters counterattacked, killing several police officers in the process. The confrontation brought an end to a 57-day protest that until that point had been largely peaceful, but the massacre also forced the Peruvian government to roll back its plans to open up the Amazon to transnational mining industries.⁹

Condemnation of García’s government had been a common theme at the Puno summit, both because of his aggressive support for neoliberal economic policies and free trade agreements, but also because of his policy of granting political asylum to conservative opposition leaders such as Manuel Rosales from Venezuela and three former Bolivian ministers who were facing prosecution for the deaths of protesters during the October 2003 “gas war.” Evo Morales had planned to address the Indigenous summit, but stayed home so as to avoid provoking an international incident. The summit’s final declaration stated that the Amazonian “struggle is our struggle,” and called for strikes in front of Peruvian embassies during the first week of June. Neighboring leftist presidents Hugo Chávez from Venezuela and Rafael Correa from Ecuador had also been invited to the summit, but neither attended. Both presidents have faced intense criticism from Indigenous communities in their respective countries for their extractive policies, with Indigenous organizations in Ecuador declaring Correa persona non grata when he showed up at the 2009 World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil to champion his version of twenty-first century socialism.

In the context of these growing tensions, Alberto Pizango, leader of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDESEP) traveled to Puno to address the summit’s closing plenary session on May 31. Delegates warmly greeted Pizango with wild cheers and applause for his leadership of the Amazonian struggle. Upon return to Peru, Pizango faced criminal charges for leading the protests and subsequently sought asylum in the Nicaraguan embassy.

More broadly, however, what was striking about the Puno summit was largely the absence of Amazonian peoples, both from Peru as well as from the broader Amazonian basin. Surprisingly, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) scheduled its congress for precisely the same days as the summit. Marlon Santi, the current president of CONAIE, historically one of the most important Indigenous organizations in the Americas, is from the Ecuadorian Amazon, and attended the CONFENIAE congress instead of coming to Puno summit.

On paper, the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organization of the Amazonian Basin (COICA) was one of the lead organizations, together with CAOI and the Central America Indigenous Council (CICA). But this was overwhelmingly a Tawantinsuyu (the old Inka Empire) summit, and some would say even a Qollasuyu summit, the part of the Inka empire that stretched south from its capital at Cuzco into current-day Bolivia. Rainbow colored Andean wipala flags decorating the entire site. The Andean languages of Quechua and Aymara were commonly heard both in public discourses and in casual conversation. Inka nationalists called for a return to Tawantinsuyu. Social forums always take on the flavor of the local environment, and these Indigenous summits are no exception. The Guatemalan summit was largely a Maya affair, and

perhaps it was to be expected that the Puno meeting would be an Andean summit.

While the continental Indigenous organizing process grows and gains strength, tensions and divisions within the movement become increasingly apparent. The Andean-Amazonian divisions were already apparent at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil, in January 2009. Meeting at the mouth of the mighty Amazon river, the Belem forum had the largest participation of Amazonian Indigenous peoples of any of the social forums. The Belem forum began with a “Pan-Amazonian Day” with a focus on climate change, food sovereignty, and regional integration. In the Indigenous tent where sessions focused on the environment, territory, and development, however, this unified front collapsed into disagreements over who should control the discussions. In a big show, Amazonian delegates left the tent and presented their own declaration to the closing assembly, separate from that of the CAOI delegates who remained behind.¹⁰

Indigenous mobilizations against the 1992 quinquennial celebrations also broke down into two clearly defined wings, with one pole focused around Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú who advocated building strategic alliances with leftist political movements, and a dissenting group who wanted to maintain a clear focus on their identities as Indigenous peoples.¹¹ The current sequence of summits emerges out of this second “ethnacist” group with its focus on Indigenous cosmologies and identity politics, but it has also assumed many of the sensibilities of the *populares* in terms of its eagerness to build alliances with other social movements and engage in overt leftist discourse that includes a sustained criticism of capitalism. Some outspoken participants at the Puno forum criticized the Catholic Church and marxist political parties as the twin enemies of Indigenous peoples, but this anti-modernist discourse hardly represented the primary line of thought at the summit. Rather than moving backwards to a pre-capitalist past, most participants would favor instead moving forward to a better and more humane socialist future.

The current divisions within international Indigenous movements are much more complicated than those that emerged at the time of the quinquennial protests, with some leaders more willing to exploit apparent advantages in allying with current governments in power or working with the United Nations to gain a significant public stage for their concerns. Another group, largely lead by the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, Mexico, represents an anarchist wing of the movement and is much more suspicious of government players, seeing the state as the problem rather than providing solutions. Some Zapatistas have allied with the Wayuu people in Venezuela who criticize president Hugo Chávez’s state-centered development models (and in the process come dangerously close to allying with the conservative anti-Chávez opposition that wants to reimplement an individualistic neoliberal capitalist economic model). The growth of evangelical christianity in Indigenous communities has also led to a significant conservative movement that is largely unwilling to engage in oppositional politics.

Within the wing of an international Indigenous movement that is organizing this series of summits, even the idea of who is included in the concept of Abya Yala becomes narrowed with colonial boundaries increasingly defining the scope of organizational strategies. In the anti-quinquennial movements and particularly in the 1990 Quito conference, participants often talked about the meeting of the northern eagle with the southern condor. Groups

such as the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC) explicitly sought to build pan-hemispheric unity from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego. Increasingly, however, when these summits present themselves as “continental” many delegates appear to construct that as the “Latin American” continent, or even the Spanish-American area of colonization. (Interestingly, in one article CAOI made a passing reference to “building our organizations from Alaska to Patagonia” in the struggle against a dying neoliberal capitalism, so the hemispheric language and concept has not entirely disappeared.¹²) Despite attempts to build a regional integration with Abya Yala North, Mohawk and Shoshone delegates from Canada and the United States were greeted as visitors similar to Indigenous Masai, Sami, Kurdish, Catalan, and Basque representatives rather than as an integral part of the conversations. Only a scattering of Indigenous peoples from Brazil attended, and together with only a handful from the U.S. and Canada, this reality left Spanish as the overwhelmingly de-facto lingua franca of the summit.

Perhaps part of the increasingly narrow geographic focus in the Abya Yala forums is due to a growing focus on the creation of a plurinational state. This proposal is currently only a realistic and viable option in Andean countries or in Guatemala where a large and well organized Indigenous movement can press the issue. Countries such as Chile which have a long history of Indigenous struggles also have similar aspirations. In contrast, small and disperse Indigenous populations in countries such as Paraguay and Honduras, much less the United States or Canada, can hope to have a similarly dramatic influence on government structures. The result, then, is a growing and coherent albeit somewhat more narrowly focused international Indigenous movement.

MOVING FORWARD

A final topic of discussion at international gatherings is where to hold the next one (and after four sequential successful meetings, whether to hold another one was hardly even raised). The summit had a large and well-organized Bolivian presence, partially because Puno is located right on the Bolivian border, but also because Bolivia has exceptionally well-organized social movements. At the women’s summit, it almost was a forgone conclusion to hold the next meeting in Bolivia in 2011. With that decision in place, the general summit and youth encounter decided to follow suit and also hold their next meetings at the same time. That decision further underscores the significant and growing influence of Qollasuyu in defining the agenda and direction of continental Indigenous organizing efforts.

The Indigenous summit, as well as the youth and women’s meetings, talked about creating a continent-wide organizational structure to carry forward the work of the summits. The call for the Puno meeting underscored that advancing a continental organizational structure was a primary goal and purpose of the gathering. Similar to statements in Guatemala two years earlier, the *Lake Titikaka Declaration* called for the formation of a Coordinating Body of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala to advance Indigenous struggles, monitor international bodies such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations, and to form an Indigenous United Nations. The women similarly proposed a Continental Coordinating Body of Indigenous Women of Abya Yala that would represent Indigenous women in international settings. The purpose of their coordinating body would be to defend the mother earth, strengthen their

organizations, make proposals, and create spaces for sharing economic, political, social, and cultural experiences. The youth followed by also calling for the formation of a Continental Coordinating Body of the Indigenous Youth of the Peoples and Nations of Abya Yala. With COICA in place in the Amazon, CAOI emerging as a strong organization in the Andes over the past three years, and the creation of CICA in Central America, some leaders noted that the missing regional pieces were a southern cone organization and one representing North America. Plans on both of those fronts are slowly advancing. It remains to be seen whether activists are able to solidify plans for such a hemispheric organization, or whether conflicting interests would tear it apart. In the meantime, creating a new continental organization remains a topic of conversation and interest.

Tupac Enrique Acosta who has long participated in these transnational meetings commented that “there are ebbs and flows in the process of the continental Indigenous movements. The summits are highlights, high points, you could say, in the process.” The summit provided a good and energetic meeting, with perhaps some of the best discussions happening outside of the sessions as part of the informal networking and conversations that happen at these types of events. Despite some hiccups and complications, the process of building a strong trans-national Indigenous movement is going well.

NOTES

- ¹ Abya Yala is the term the Kuna people of Panama use to describe the Americas. Indigenous activists have increasingly embraced it as an alternative to Euro-centric language.
- ² Marc Becker, “Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala: From Resistance to Power,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2008): 85–107.
- ³ Igidio Naveda Felix, “The Reconstitution of Indigenous Peoples in the Peruvian Andes,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 3 (November 2008): 309–17.
- ⁴ Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI), “Puno es una fiesta,” *Boletín Informativo de la Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas* 3, no. 9 (May 2009): 10.
- ⁵ Ramiro Escobar, “What’s next for Amazonia?” *Latinamerica Press*, <http://www.lapress.org/>, June 25, 2009.
- ⁶ Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI), “Unidad en la diversidad,” *Boletín Informativo de la Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas* 3, no. 9 (May 2009): 3.
- ⁷ Declaración Política Puno Peru (2009), <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/juventudpuno09.php>
- ⁸ Ramiro Escobar, “What’s next for Amazonia?” *Latinamerica Press*, <http://www.lapress.org/>, June 25, 2009.
- ⁹ Raúl Zibechi, “Massacre in the Amazon: The U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement Sparks a Battle Over Land and Resources,” *Americas Program Special Report* (Washington, DC: Center for International Policy, June 16, 2009), <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6191>; Laura Carlsen, “Victory in the Amazon,” *Americas Program Special Report* (Washington, DC: Center for International Policy, June 22, 2009), <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6206>; “Convulsion in the Amazon shakes Peru’s Garcia,” *Andean Group Report* RA-09-06 (June 2009): 1–3.
- ¹⁰ The two statements are available as the *Declaration of Indigenous Peoples*, <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/caoiws>

f09_en.php; and the *Declaration of the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin* (COICA), http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/state/coicawsf09_en.php

- ¹¹ Charles R. Hale, “Between Che Guevara and the Pachamama: Mestizos, Indians and Identity Politics in the Anti-Quincentenary Campaign,” *Critique of Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (1994): 9–39.
- ¹² Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI), “Puno es una fiesta,” *Boletín Informativo de la Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas* 3, no. 9 (May 2009): 10.

MORE INFORMATION

The Lake Titikaka Declaration

<http://www.abayalanet.org/node/20>

Manifiesto of the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women

<http://links.org.au/node/1110>

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